

Attorneys Honored with Circuit Awards

Four Virginia attorneys have been recognized with Circuit Awards for extraordinary contributions to the justice system through pro bono or minimally compensated court-appointed cases.

The awards are bestowed by the Virginia State Bar's Special Committee on Access to Legal Services through a pilot project that began in 2005. Selected judicial circuits were invited by the bar to nominate attorneys who meet the criteria for the award, and the access committee chose the honorees.

Awards presentations will be arranged for the honored attorneys in their respective circuits. They will receive a certificate signed by Virginia Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell Sr. and Virginia State Bar President Howard W. Martin Jr.

The 2007 winners are:

Twentieth Judicial Circuit

(Fauquier, Loudoun, and Rappahannock counties)

Bernadette Rush O'Reilly, a family law practitioner with Campbell Miller Zimmerman PC in Leesburg.

Since 2005, O'Reilly has provided pro bono representation in complicated family law cases referred to her by Legal Services of Northern Virginia.

She has devoted many hours of pro bono time assisting clients through the Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter. She helps them obtain protective orders and sometimes continues to represent them in custody and divorce matters.

O'Reilly said that, based on her experience, "generally, the victims of domestic violence are without the funds to hire attorneys, . . . and the abusers are able to hire firms, as they are in charge of the marital funds."

She also has shared her pro bono experience with other lawyers. "In spite of her busy schedule, she has been a willing mentor for pro bono attorneys assisting LSNV clients," according to a nomination letter from Q. Russell Hatchl, the LSNV pro bono coordinator.

O'Reilly has an undergraduate degree in finance from the University of Virginia and a law degree from George Mason University.

Twenty-First Judicial Circuit

(Martinsville and Patrick and Henry counties)

Michael W. Cannaday, a general practice attorney in Collinsville.

After his admission to the bar in 1973, he returned to his native community of Martinsville and Henry County and immediately signed up for the court-appointed list.

"He has distinguished himself from other bar members as being one of the few who have continuously been on the court-appointed list," said James R. McGarry in a nomination letter. When the Public Defender's Office experienced a backlog, "Michael Cannaday volunteered to represent court-appointed clients on one day of each week in the Henry County General District Court."

Cannaday continues that arrangement. "If it were not for his service, the court would have had to scale back on its criminal case docket," McGarry wrote.

Cannaday has an undergraduate degree from the University of Virginia and a law degree from the College of William and Mary.

The late **Benjamin R. Gardner**, a general practitioner who devoted substantial time during his thirty-five years of practice to



Bernadette Rush O'Reilly



Michael W. Cannaday



Benjamin R. Gardner



Ross C. Hart

represent indigent and low-income residents of Martinsville and Henry County.

Gardner accepted many court-appointed cases, some of them difficult and high-profile. As often as not, he submitted no voucher for payment, according to his partner and brother, Philip G. Gardner, and the nomination letter by James R. McGarry. Ben Gardner also was a substitute judge of the local juvenile and domestic relations court and general district court. A member of the Martinsville-Henry County Bar Association, Gardner could “always be counted on to step up and fill a need,” McGarry wrote.

Gardner was active in community affairs throughout his career. Notwithstanding struggles with cancer, he chaired the coalition that established the Martinsville-Henry County Economic Development Corporation to produce jobs as factories

in the area were closing. He received numerous awards honoring him for community service.

He and his brother formed the Martinsville firm that is now Gardner, Gardner, Barrow and Sharpe PC.

Gardner died of cancer on September 9, late in the Circuit Awards nominations process.

Twenty-Third Judicial Circuit
(Roanoke County and the cities of Roanoke and Salem)

Ross C. Hart of Salem, a third-generation member of Hart & Hart Attorneys Ltd., a family law firm founded in 1894.

In the past eight years, Hart accepted twenty-two pro bono referrals from Blue Ridge Legal Services Inc., according to the

nomination letter from BRLS executive director John E. Whitfield.

Some of the cases were complex and time-consuming. Hart handled estate matters, and he helped clients obtain guardianship in cases involving mental retardation, brain injury, and Alzheimer’s disease.

He also conducted an Incapacity Planning Seminar at an assisted living facility in Roanoke, and has executed wills, powers of attorney, and advance medical directives for elderly residents at a retirement community.

Hart has a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Monmouth College in Illinois and a law degree from the University of Virginia. His practice focuses on elder law, wills and estates, real estate, and landlord-tenant matters.